

**SUMMARY OF THE  
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE TELECONFERENCE  
AUGUST 11, 1998**

The Proficiency Testing Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference on Tuesday, August 11, 1998, at 3 p.m. Eastern. The meeting was led by its chair, Ms. Anne Rhyne of the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. Attachment C contains additions to EPA's National Standards PE Criteria Document as discussed herein. *The purpose of the meeting was to select two new committee members and to review and prioritize remaining issues from the past year.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Ms. Rhyne opened the meeting by thanking the committee members for all their hard work leading up to and including the NELAC IV conference. She told the committee that she had received many good comments.

Ms. Rhyne announced that Ms. Betsy Dutrow is replacing Dr. Ken Jackson as the PT Committee's liaison to the NELAC Board of Directors. Betsy also will continue to serve as the "go-between" for committee interactions with EPA and NIST.

**ADMINISTRATIVE**

Dr. George Breuer and Mr. Dale Piechocki have rotated off the committee. Committee members were sent overnight packets containing nomination forms to review. The committee's charge was to elect two new members: one to represent State or federal government and one for private industry. It was pointed out that there cannot be two members on the committee from the same company at the same time.

Ms. Rhyne reviewed the list of nominees and provided background information on each. After discussion, nominees were voted on. Two nominees were unanimously approved by voting members to be the new committee members, subject to approval by the Board of Directors.

**"PARKING LOT" ISSUES, DISCUSSION & PRIORITIZATION**

Ms. Rhyne reviewed a list of "parking lot" issues from past conference calls. She introduced each of these issues and asked committee members for discussion and prioritization of action items. The committee will also continue to work on Appendices F, G, and H (Radiochemistry, Environmental Toxicology, and Air).

**Regression Equations for the Prioritized Analyte List**

Mr. Matt Caruso, Mr. Chuck Wibby, and Mr. Tom Coyner will form a subcommittee to work on the regression equations. Mr. Bob Graves, from EPA, will also be working on this. The regression equations have been identified as a high priority item, however, they will probably not be completed by the end of August.

### **DMRQA - Will EPA accept NELAC PT data for DMRQA studies?**

Mr. Bob Graves said that he will contact a key person within EPA's OECA tomorrow and will e-mail Anne following their discussion.

### **Whole Effluent Toxicity**

Appendix G, Environmental Toxicology, defines the criteria applying the PT program to the whole effluent toxicity, sediment toxicity, and soils toxicity programs. It is still undetermined whether or not DMRQA fits in with NELAC. The subcommittee will continue to work on this. Mr. Coyner suggested that the committee find out who possible providers are and include some of them in the subcommittee.

### **Database Issues**

Mr. Coyner said that he thought most of the recommendations made by the PT Committee on the national database have been accepted. Mr. Bob Graves agreed that issues had been resolved. Additions to the analyte list will be assigned codes without problem. However, he said that they do need evaluation criteria. Fixed limits and/or regression equations are preferred. Ms. Reenie Parris asked if the evaluation criteria will be based on past performance. Mr. Coyner replied that the PT Committee will start with historical data and see how it looks.

### **Should a State be allowed to choose the Provider(s)?**

The PT Committee had agreed to work with the State of New Jersey on this issue. One committee member asked whether the States can be polled for their opinions. Someone then asked about the best mechanism to do this.

One person suggested a workgroup vote; several options could be offered and a vote taken. Mr. Coyner said that it appears that people do not understand the timing issues. He suggested perhaps distributing to State representatives a two-page document with a flowsheet attached and ask for comment (i.e., lay out the committee's proposed plans and explain the impact on the States). It was agreed that a position paper will be developed and the paper will request comments.

### **FEDERAL REGISTER NOTICE RE DRINKING WATER METHODS FOR CERTAIN PESTICIDES AND MICROBES**

An electronic copy of the Proposed Rule in the July 31, 1998, Federal Register (Volume 63, Number 147) entitled "National Primary Drinking Water Regulations: Analytical Methods for Certain Pesticides and Microbial Contaminants; Proposed Rule" was distributed to PT Committee members via email on August 5, 1998. The question put to committee members is "How does this affect NELAC standards?"

One comment was that this document requires proficiency tests be run for each method. It was noted this is more stringent than the current NELAC standards. Another opinion was that its intent is to make PTs more method-specific. It was agreed that this needs to be clarified.

It was pointed out that this is a proposal, and comments are requested. Ms. Dutrow said that it may take time for review of official comments. She recommended that the committee put in

writing their comments to EPA and also copy Mr. Steve Clark for his information (EPA, Drinking Water).

Someone asked whether the formal document should come from the PT Committee or from the NELAC Board of Directors. Ms. Dutrow said that she would bring this up with the Board to get their opinion. Ms. Rhyne commented that she believed communications on technical issues related to the standards should be through the committee, and not through the Board.

Mr. David Friedman suggested that since the close of the comment period (September 29, 1998) is not far off, the committee should get Mr. Clark involved soon. He noted that the rules [for discussion of the proposed document] change after the deadline.

### **EPA/NIST/EMMC ITEMS**

Ms. Rhyne reminded participants that the last hour of each teleconference is intended for issues raised by EPA and/or NIST. In effect, this forces the PT Committee to address the bigger picture. Her intent is to spend the next 2 to 2½ months discussing issues with EPA and NIST. She said that there should not be any contradictions within the standards written by NIST, EPA, and the PT Committee. Ms. Rhyne reminded participants to stay focused and to limit what we are going to work on in the next couple months.

### **NIST Handbook 150-XX and Schedule**

Ms. Rhyne asked Ms. Parris for an update on the status of the NIST Handbook 150-XX. Ms. Parris said that they are finalizing the second draft of the Handbook and expect it to be done in approximately two more weeks. This will be the working copy for the first year of NELAC accreditation. Their goal for the first class of accreditations to be issued in February, 1999 (not January). Before audits can begin, quality systems documents must be approved. Therefore, no specific date can be set for audits. There will be an announcement in the Federal Register to let laboratories know when applications will be accepted. NIST will also send out announcements to those on its mailing list. The deadline for the first class has not yet been determined either.

Ms. Parris said that the committee's comments regarding ongoing monitoring have already been incorporated into the Handbook. She also said that the Handbook will be changing next year. NIST is keeping track of required changes in an ongoing fashion.

### **Performance Based Measurement System (PBMS) and Solid Waste**

Ms. Rhyne asked about the formation of subcommittees for coordination between EMMC and NELAC (focusing on PBMS and solid waste), as per discussions at NELAC IV. There is a workgroup set up to study PBMS, and the work is ongoing. Mr. Friedman read the agenda for a meeting on August 25 between the board and ELAB; the entire focus of the meeting is PBMS. Ms. Rhyne said that she wants to pursue solid waste to ensure that NELAC standards are multimedia.

### **National Standards**

A participant asked whether the EPA National Standards are available yet. The answer was that they are not yet available, but may be posted on EPA's Office of Water web pages and possibly on the Office of Research and Development's web pages.

Additional definitions have been added to the WS and WP portions of the National Standards PE Criteria Document. These definitions are included in Attachment C. Mr. Graves explained the definitions. He said that the measurements will be in ampules. There are two modes: 1) quantitative and 2) qualitative and quantitative. In the second, if the analyte is present, then it should be quantified; a zero value should be assigned if an analyte is not present; and blank responses to qualitative analytes will not be evaluated (indicates that laboratory has no interest in certification for the particular analyte).

One committee member said that he always thought of the radiochemistry studies as both qualitative and quantitative (and all in ampules). Another committee member agreed. If the laboratory reports nothing, then it is viewed as an unacceptable response. Labs must list all analytes that potentially might be there. One problem was noted for the "less than" value. For example, if a laboratory reports a value of "< 20", and the acceptable range is "20 - 40", then this will be a "wrong" answer. The PT Committee will email their suggestions (table format) to Mr. Graves. Mr. Graves said that they already have an algorithm to evaluate these situations, but will look at the committee's suggestions. Mr. Graves also said that he would ask Mr. Ray Wesselman to email Ms. Rhyne with an expected completion date for EPA's Radiochemistry section.

**ACTION ITEMS  
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE TELECONFERENCE  
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<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Date to be Completed</b>
1.	Continue to work on regression equations for the prioritized analyte list.	mid-October
2.	Write a position paper to explain the committee's stance on choosing Proficiency Test Provider(s), and solicit comment. Distribute this to State representatives.	mid-October
3.	Prepare written comments to respond to the July 31, 1998, Federal Register posting of the "National Primary Drinking Water Regulations: Analytical Methods for Certain Pesticides and Microbial Contaminants: Proposed Rule."	first week in September
4.	Ms. Dutrow will contact EPA's Office of Water to ask their participation in the next PT Committee conference call.	done
5.	Send suggested solution for "less than" analysis results regarding qualitative and quantitative analyses for radiochemistry samples to Mr. Graves.	
6.	Continue to work on Appendices for Air, Radiochemistry, and Environmental Toxicology.	

**PARTICIPANTS**  
**PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE TELECONFERENCE**  
**AUGUST 11, 1998**

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**Study Mode** - The provider has the option to perform the study in one of two modes: quantitative only or qualitative and quantitative.

Quantitative Mode: In the quantitative only mode the provider prepares samples in which the analytes are known to the laboratory. The laboratory responds with a value for each of the known analytes. Each value per analyte is compared to the acceptance limits. If the value is within the limits, the value is evaluated as acceptable. There is no qualitative evaluation in the quantitative only mode.

Qualitative and Quantitative Mode: In the qualitative and quantitative mode, the provider prepares samples in which the analytes are not known to the laboratory. The laboratory should respond with values for analytes that are present, and < values or zero for analytes that are not present. To have an acceptable evaluation under the qualitative and quantitative mode, the analyte must be correctly identified and the value must be within the acceptance limits. Unacceptable evaluations will be given when the analyte is misidentified or the value is outside the acceptance limits. Blank responses to qualitative analytes will not be evaluated. For analytes that are not present, an evaluation of unacceptable will occur if the laboratory reports a real value or a > value. For qualitative analytes which are not present, the provider will assign a zero as the assigned value.